Prayer Service for National Day of Prayer

1. **What is the National Day of Prayer for Peace?**

   This past November, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops voted to designate January 1, 2002, the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, as a National Day of Prayer for Peace. This action was taken in the light of the terrorist attacks of September 11th and the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

2. **How can individuals observe this day?**

   The most appropriate way for individuals to take part in this day is to pray for peace. On January 1st we ask Mary, our mother and Mother of the Church, to intercede for us as her children. For this reason, the USCCB Committee on the Liturgy has developed a series of reflections on the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary (*A Rosary for Peace: Meditations on the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary*, available by calling 1-800-235-8722) for use in private or public prayer.

3. **What prayers and readings should be used for Mass and the *Liturgy of the Hours* on January 1st?**

   Only the prayers and readings for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God may be used on this day. However, these liturgical and scriptural texts are rich with reflections on our search for peace. These, or similar themes, might well be incorporated into the homily. Likewise, the General Intercessions could appropriately include petitions like the following:

   - For the President and the members of Congress, That they may seek the way of peace, with wisdom and strength; We pray to the Lord.
   - For all the victims of war and destruction: for their healing and peace; We pray to the Lord.
   - For children orphaned by violence, and for those widowed by war; We pray to the Lord.
   - For the members of our armed services, that God might send an angel to guard them, then to return them safely to those who love them; We pray to the Lord.
   - For an end to all war and violence, that Christ's peace might prevail; We pray to the Lord.

4. **What aspects of the scriptural readings or prayers for the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, might be incorporated into a homily for the National Day of Prayer for Peace?**
   In the first reading for today, the Lord himself gives a blessing to his priest Aaron through Moses in the Book of Numbers (6: 22-27). He directs Aaron to invoke the same three-part blessing still found among the Solemn Blessings of the *Sacramentary*, where God is asked to keep us, to shine upon us, and to give us his peace. The third blessing is the natural consequence of the first two: for it is only when we seek God's care and enjoy his rich blessings that we can know "the peace the world cannot give."

   The Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 67: 2-3, 6, 8), like today's prayer for peace, is a call for God's mercy (antiphon: *May God bless us in his mercy*). With the Psalmist, we ask for the blessing of God's mercy "among all nations," in order that they may "be glad and exult," and that "all the peoples may praise God and all the ends of the earth fear him." Peace is to be found only in God, who rules the whole earth "with equity." Thus, just as God offers his friendship to all the nations, so does he offer his peace.

   Shepherds were among the poorest and most forgotten of Jesus' day. They had no political influence, no wealth or weapons, and no means of power. God first sent his angel to the poor shepherds in the Bethlehem hills to announce the good news of great joy that today his Son, the Prince of Peace, was born for all mankind. Today we join the shepherds (Luke 2: 16-21) and adore the child in the arms of his Blessed Virgin Mother. In his littleness, we are made strong. By his innocence, we are freed from sin. By his brokenness, we are made whole. Only a few days before, we sang the hymn of the Divine Child sleeping in heavenly peace. Today, as that child rests in Mary's arms, may we know heavenly peace as well!

   The second option for the Opening Prayer today speaks eloquently of the light God offers every age amidst the

darkness of the world's sin: "Father, source of light in every age, the virgin conceived and bore your Son, who is called Wonderful God, Prince of Peace." The prayer then looks to Mary's maternal intercession for us: "May her prayer, the gift of a Mother's love, be your people's joy through all ages." Finally, the prayer asks that Mary's example "born of a humble heart, draw your Spirit to rest on your people..." Mary is presented to us as the model believer who believed the unfathomable message of Gabriel, endured the initial doubt of Joseph and the exile in Egypt, witnessed the events of Christ's public life, and was tried at the foot of the cross.

We, as members of Christ, with Mary as our Mother and Model, are called to the same faith, now in the grim reality of war, of terrorism, of hatred, of unrestrained violence and the threat of biological attacks. We may feel powerless in the face of so much real and potential evil, but we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of powerlessness. In doing so we shortchange the power of God who hears our prayer and works through us. We are called to believe that God has a plan for us and that God's plan will prevail. We are also called to collaborate in that plan by our own prayer made in union with Christ, our Head, by our efforts to promote peace with those whose lives intersect with ours.

5. What about selections of liturgical music for the day? Many traditional songs asking God to grant us peace may be found in most hymnals and participation aids, including *For the Healing of the Nations, Let There be Peace on Earth*, and *Make Me a Channel of Your Peace*. In addition, the following appropriate hymns are found in the worship aids of particular publishers:

    - From World Library Publications: *O God of Love, O King of Peace Peace for Our Times*
    - From OCP Publications: *God of Peace Peace I Leave With You, My Friends*
    - From GIA Publications: *O God of Love, O King of Peace Healer of Every Ill*
    - From Concordia Publishing House and Selah Publishing Company: *Greet Now the Swiftly Changing Year*

6. **Our parish customarily celebrates Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours on Solemnities. What aspects of this liturgy might be highlighted on January 1st?**

    If possible, Evening Prayer might be scheduled as a special event at which the parish, on this first day of a new year, can come together and with hearts and minds united to reflect on and pray about the exchanging of peace, the possibility of peace and the responsibility for peace that has been given to each baptized Christian. Coming together will involve some sacrifice of time and the more popular New Years Day pastimes of food and football— but the extraordinary events of the past four months demand extraordinary effort. While it would be desirable to sing the psalms and/or canticles of Evening Prayer, an inability to sing should not preclude the celebration of Evening Prayer. Every parish can at least to begin the Hour with a hymn, while the texts of the psalms, readings and prayers retain their ability to praise God and to touch us even though we are unable to sing them. The two psalms and the canticle for Evening Prayer II which are taken from the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary are rich in themes of peace:

    - **Psalm 22:** *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.*
      We are capable of peace by God's grace: Christ came to share in our humanity and the liturgy of Christmas calls him the King who is our peace. We share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

    - **Psalm 127:** *Peace, like all our efforts, is ultimately the work of God.*
      We are called by our baptism to be instruments of peace for those around us and for the world. We need to believe that, although our efforts to pray and work for peace may seem small and insignificant, God is indeed building the house.

    - **Canticle: Ephesians 1:3-10** *God's plan to bring all into one.*
      Our hopes for peace rest on solid ground. God has chosen us, has redeemed us, forgiven our sins and drawn us into the plan he was pleased to decree in Christ, "to bring all things into one in him, in the heavens and on the earth."

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